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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Ontario's Compost Pile - Exports Shift to New York

Ref: (A) Toronto 33

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Sensitive But Unclassified -- Please protect accordingly.

1. (U) Summary: Ontario faces an overflow of kitchen compost, and has begun sending thousands of tons to New York state for incineration. The province's Green Bin program has grown so quickly that it has outstripped the ability of municipalities to process organic kitchen waste locally, a situation that is expected to continue into the foreseeable future. Cities such as Toronto are struggling to ramp-up their processing capacity as they aim to meet their own waste diversion deadlines -- an integral part of the province's agreement to phase out municipal trash shipments to Michigan by the end of 2010. The shipment of organic waste to New York seems acceptable to all parties for now. Over time, however, the expected Ontario annual excess of 50,000 or more metric tons by the end of 2010, much of which will end up in New York, may strain New Yorkers' patience and generate familiar complaints about foreign garbage unless the U.S. recipients prepare to proactively make the case that the organic waste imports work to New York's advantage by lowering New York power costs and generating local jobs. End Summary.

Green Bin Program Saves Green Money

2. (U) Ontario's Green Bin program was introduced in Toronto in 2002 as a means to reduce the amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) that was shipped to landfills. Originally pledging 100% MSW diversion by 2010, in 2007 Toronto changed its goal to 70% waste diversion by 2010, which coincides with the province's 2006 commitment to Michigan to phase out shipments of MSW to that state, following threats of legislative action by Michigan's Senators (reftel).

3. (U) The province has successfully encouraged other Ontario municipalities to introduce Green Bin programs. Since 2002, the other three largest regional municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) - York, Peel, and Durham Regions - all have adopted Green Bin programs. In fact, most major Ontario cities have them, with the exception of London, Windsor, and Ottawa. In 2007, Ontario municipalities collected 251,368 metric tons of kitchen scraps in green bins, up 30% from a year earlier.

4. (U) Toronto's composting program is the largest-scale program of its kind in North America. Some 510,000 single-family homes in Toronto already have access to the city's kitchen composting program, whereby people can put out organic waste (food scraps, paper towels, coffee grounds, and other similar waste material) separately from other garbage and recycling items. According to City of Toronto officials, 95% of single-family households currently use the Green Bin program, and organics represent 30% of household

waste. At multi-unit dwellings, Green Bin programs are being phased-in over 18 months, and all 4,500 apartment and condominium complexes (490,000 homes) in the city should be included in the program by 2010, increasing organic waste collection from all participating Toronto households to 170,000 metric tons annually, up from about 115,000 metric tons in 2008.

15. (U) In order to encourage Green Bin and recycling compliance, Toronto began charging single-family homes a waste management fee in November 2008, whereby trash bins are issued to all city households. Households receive five additional tags per two-month period, which allow standard-size bags of non-recyclable garbage to be picked up at no extra charge. Additional garbage collection costs C\$3.10 per tag/bag, whereas collection of Green Bin organic waste, also known as source-separated organics (SSO), is free. Garbage bag collection restrictions have also been introduced elsewhere in the GTA, including York and Durham.

But Organic Waste Smells Rotten

16. (U) Ontario's Green Bin program has grown so quickly that it has outstripped the ability of municipalities to process the organic waste locally. Instead, thousands of metric tons of kitchen waste have been shipped to Covanta Energy, in Niagara Falls, New York, for incineration. York Region sent nearly 12,000 metric tons of green bin waste to Covanta between March and August 2008. The southwestern Ontario city of Guelph, considered a composting pioneer, has shipped 10,000 metric tons of kitchen waste a year to Covanta Energy since Guelph closed its own facility in 2006 due to odor problems and to structural weaknesses at the facility's building caused by ammonia. As of this writing, no kitchen waste from Toronto has been shipped to New York for incineration. Instead, Toronto shipped roughly 1,000 truckloads of organic waste to Quebec each year until November 2008, when the two plants in Quebec - GSI Environment and Ferti-Val - were closed, mostly due to

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severe odor problems.

Fixing the Problem

17. (U) The city of Toronto is now processing 100% of its kitchen waste in Ontario. Since November, when the Quebec plants closed, Toronto has ramped up contracts with two new Ontario facilities -- Dutch-owned Orgaworld, near London, Ontario, which opened in 2007, and Universal Resource, a C\$17 million recycling and composting facility in Welland, Ontario, which opened in 2008. Toronto now ships about 70,000 metric tons of organics annually to these two plants. York Region ships 30,000 to the Orgaworld facility. At full capacity, the Orgaworld facility is expected to process 150,000 metric tons a year.

18. (U) In 2007, Toronto City Council approved two new composting facilities within the city's limits. At full capacity, each of the two facilities will be capable of processing 55,000 metric tons of organic material -- two-thirds of the city's projected 2010 processing needs.

19. (U) Outside of Toronto, the city of Guelph also plans to re-establish a compost plant by 2011 that will process 30,000 metric tons of organic waste per year. Since the facility's capacity will exceed what the city currently produces in kitchen waste, the new facility expects to be able to accept organic waste from other municipalities for a fee of C\$50-100 per metric ton. Peel Region has a compost-curing facility, located in Caledon, which also closed in 2007 due to odor problems. After that closure, Peel Region shipped 50 truckloads of partially composted kitchen waste to a Barrie topsoil company in 2007. The company did not have approval from the Ontario Ministry of Environment to accept unfinished compost, however, and since has worked with Peel Region to clean up of thousands of plastic bags that held the organics. Peel Region plans to reopen its Caledon curing facility in April 2009 after spending nearly C\$11 million on upgrades to help curb the odor problem.

110. (U) Ontario is currently reviewing its Waste Diversion Act.

Municipalities are hopeful that the Act will contain a policy to establish multiple grades of compost for waste diversion, instead of just one, as it has today. (Note: Having multiple compost grades allows processed SSO to be used for a broader range of applications, such as brownfield redevelopment, instead of being limited to agricultural and gardening use, ultimately diverting more SSO from landfill.) The public consultation phase closed on April 1, 2009. We do not expect to see a comprehensive plan to help municipalities recycle organic waste since the primary focus of the review is on the diversion of industrial, commercial, and institutional waste, which account for two-thirds of all Ontario's non-hazardous solid waste, including organic waste.

¶11. (U) Comment: The good news is that by 2010, Ontario expects that its total organic waste processing capacity will reach 450,000 metric tons, although that may be an optimistic estimate, given the province's past failure to meet earlier goals, such as opening new landfills so garbage would not have to be exported to Michigan. Unfortunately, even if processing capacity reaches 450,000 metric tons by the end of 2010, by that time Ontario is expected to produce some 500,000 metric tons of kitchen-based organic waste annually. While some of the extra 50,000 or more metric tons may end up in Quebec, Covanta Energy in New York is also a likely destination.

¶12. (SBU) As the New York public becomes aware of the shipments, there may be a rising chorus of local complaints about odor, the stigma of being the recipient of another country's garbage, and perhaps the carbon footprint associated with transporting and incinerating the material (although transport and processing elsewhere in Ontario probably would result in a similar net carbon footprint). If New York benefits economically from receiving the waste shipments - for example, via cheaper fuel for power generation and additional local jobs - officials there may wish to be prepared to quickly explain the benefits at such time as the shipments become a political issue. End Comment.

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